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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a brief synopsis of recent trends in moral education and suggests ways in which a blending of idea and product technologies can promote the development of four specific moral sentiments: sympathy, duty, fairness, and self-control. Four integrated strategies that teacher educators can use to help preservice and inservice teachers "plug into" these moral sentiments are described: (1) virtual gatherings--a form of telecommunication activity meant to bring together participants from different geographic locations and time zones; (2) social action projects--real world contexts for humanitarian, action-oriented telecommunications activities; (3) careful selection and re-purposing of computer courseware; and (4) video production projects. (AEF)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Technology and the Moral Sense: Re-Wiring Moral Education

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It's a random kind of thing
Come upon a delicate flower
I can't believe a machine gun sings
Driveby, driveby, driveby, driveby
— Neil Young

Although written in 1994, the lyrics of Neil Young's "Driveby" clearly foreshadow what has become an even more common occurrence in 1997. From his concerns about driveby shootings, we have moved to frequent reports of in-school muggings and abandonment of newborns in dumpsters and toilets. Consequently, these events have prompted many parents and educators to demand increased attention to our children's moral education. Under such pressure, many educators have turned again to programs using values clarification and/or moral reasoning. Critics, however, claim that such programs lack the moral content to provide learners with a true moral compass to guide their actions (Sommers, 1984). Others respond that the diversity of values among the burgeoning public school communities render a consensus on moral education almost impossible. We intend to give a brief synopsis of recent trends in moral education and suggest ways in which a blending of idea and product technologies can promote the development of four specific moral sentiments.

Background: Grounding Our Moral Circuitry

Moral education has, in various forms, been a consistent component of American education since colonial times; however, dramatic changes in recent American culture have rendered efforts at engaging moral education in the public school classroom increasingly controversial. Commenting on this reality, McClellan (1992) explained that during the 1960's and 1970's:

> The forces that made moral education so problematic for public schools were the products of a number of social and cultural upheavals. The effort to end racial discrimination, the waging of an unpopular war, a deepening cultural pluralism, and a growing willingness to expand the range of acceptable personal conduct all worked to weaken the commitment of schools to moral education. . . . With deep suspicions now sharpening racial, ethnic, and class divisions, Americans lost faith in their ability to find common ground. Increasingly they sought to preserve a fragile peace by accepting differences and encouraging tolerance. In the process, they elevated relativism into a primary social value. (p.84)

In many communities, such relativism became increasingly antagonistic to the "content" of character education programs that prescribed specific virtues and conduct. Consequently, school districts frequently turned to Simon's Values Clarification Program and/or to Kohlberg's Moral Reasoning Approach since each model encouraged, in different ways, the development of a student's personal value and belief system and minimized the cultivation of specific character traits (McClellan, 1992). In various configurations, these two approaches continue to be the scaffolding of numerous moral education programs throughout the country today, although many public schools are returning to "repackaged" character education programs, which ironically often employ elements of values clarification or moral reasoning (Lickona, 1988).

The Moral Sense

Simon's and Kohlberg's respective models, and even contemporary hybrid models of earlier character education programs, focus centrally on the cognitive dimensions of moral conduct—what are the moral issues or dilemmas and how should one address and act on them? Recent research on moral development, however, has identified core moral sentiments or "feeling states" that contribute significantly to

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the development of moral awareness and moral behavior. Damon (1988) contends that most scholars believe that emotions are a natural component of a child's social repertoire, and that the potential for moral-emotional reactions is present at birth. Some have gone even further in claiming that moral emotions constitute the one feature that unites humans from all the world's diverse cultures.

While various developmental psychologists and moral educators have been researching these moral sentiments (Damon, 1988, 1994; Kagan, 1984), Wilson's (1993) analysis is especially clear and convincing. He has identified four moral sentiments that, he claims, are innate and that comprise the bedrock of human moral behavior: sympathy, duty, fairness, and self-control. These sentiments are not themselves the "content" of moral action, but rather the predisposition for moral action. Each culture defines how these sentiments are operationalized or put into action (Damon, 1988).

Moral Sentiments: Plugging-In

In the context of Wilson's research, it is clear to us that teacher educators have an obligation to address issues of moral education intentionally by providing preservice and in-service teachers fruitful strategies that foster the cultivation of moral sentiments. Furthermore, we contend that educational technology is an especially effective tool in engendering the development of sympathy, duty, fairness, and self-control in the classroom. With these assertions in mind, we intend that this paper serve as a point of departure for teacher educators—especially for those who teach technology utilization courses. We showcase here four foundational moral sentiments that may be incorporated with educational technology, basically a blending of product and idea technologies (Sweeder, Bednar, & Ryan, in press; Hooper & Reiber, 1995). Four integrated strategies that we believe pre- and in-service teachers can use to "plug into" those moral sentiments include virtual gatherings, social action projects, problem-solving computer courseware, and video production projects. It is our hope that by introducing our pre and in-service teachers to these strategies that they will, in turn, share them with *their* present and/or future students in order to heighten *their* moral sensibilities.

Virtual Gatherings: Sympathy

A virtual gathering (Harris, 1995) is a form of telecommunication activity which is meant to "bring together participants from different geographic locations and time zones in real-time to either participate virtually 'in person,' in a computer-mediated meeting, or simultaneously 'in spirit,' without direct electronic contact, in similar activities at different project sites" (p.61). Virtual gatherings appear to be an ideal way for teachers to develop the moral sentiment of sympathy. For instance, after defining what virtual gatherings are and discussing examples of how they have been used in basic education, teacher educators can have their pre and in-service teachers invent their own virtual gathering projects. For example, one might have pre and in-service teachers participate in a combination of outreach activities similar to one identified by Harris as "A Day Without Art," which took place in Florida across all sixty-seven school districts in observance of the Eighth Annual World AIDS Day (1995). Using a combination of Internet Relay Chats, and a preorganized symbolic action targeting the removal of blindfolds from museum statuary, "A Day Without Art" helped not only to develop AIDS awareness, but also to engender sympathy for the welfare of those afflicted with that life-threatening disease.

Harris' virtual gathering project might serve as a template for other ways in which we could develop student awareness for the moral sentiment of sympathy: Why not "A Day Without TV," in order to spend some time visiting or talking to the elderly or infirm, or "A Day Without Dessert" in order to devote time collecting food for the homeless both at home and abroad? Using curriculum-specific topics as springboards, science, literature, or mathematics teachers could concurrently address content and/or community-based concerns, technology use, and emotional pre-dispositions.

The Social Action Project: Duty

Teacher educators can also use the Internet to help their pre- and in-service teachers tap into a variety of real world contexts for humanitarian, action-oriented telecommunications activities which involve children. "Social action projects" range from helping raise money in aiding the homeless, to organizing, scheduling, and conducting worldwide beach sweeps in order to "Save the Earth's Beaches." Again, technology-infused projects of this nature address not only traditional curricular concerns but also heighten students' moral consciousness and develop their communal, if not universal, sense of duty or responsibility to humanity.

Decisions, Decisions: Fairness

An effective way teacher educators might help pre- and in-service teachers recognize how to incorporate the moral sentiment of fairness would be through the careful selection and re-purposing of computer courseware. For example, Tom Snyder's *Decisions, Decisions: The Environment* (Dockterman, 1990) and its accompanying teacher's guide (Dockterman, 1988) are primarily intended to improve student decision-making and critical thinking skills. However, with a modicum of creativity, classroom teachers can readily adapt this technology to develop their students' moral sense of *fairness*. In *Decisions, Decisions: The Environment*, students are encouraged via small and/or large group collaboration, multiple perspective-taking, and role-playing simulations to analyze and solve a "real-life situation" —namely, What is causing fish to die in the local pond? Playing the role of the mayor of Alpine, students are asked not only to solve this multifaceted problem, but also

take into consideration the advice of four mayoral advisors: an independent scientist, an economist, a campaign manager, and a representative of an environmental council.

Figure 1: Four mayoral advisors from Decisions, Decisions: The Environment

In addition, the mayor has to weigh and balance a number of other complicating circumstances, such as preserving the valuable jobs which are at stake at the local mining company, a company which may be the possible source of the pond's pollution problem. All of this, by the way, takes place during a crucial election year!

Video Production: Self-Control

Teacher educators can explore the moral sentiment of *self-control* with their pre- and in-service students through video production projects. For instance, by experiencing the three-stage, videographic process—pre-production, the 'shoot' itself, and post-production—students also learn about the four basic elements of cooperative learning (Kindsvatter, Wilen, & Ishler, 1992), which collectively deal with the establishment, maintenance, and promotion of interpersonal relationships. An important aspect of any challenging, collaborative endeavor such as the creation of a coherent "movie story" (Sherman, 1991) necessitates self-control and the ability to compromise, especially at a video project's outset, the pre-production phase, when themes, plots, characters, dialog, responsibilities, and so on are being invented and determined collectively. Compromise, by definition, involves the settlement of individual differences, at least in the short run, in order to permit a project to move forward, prosper, and meet the longer-range goals of the group: a completed, creative, and coherent video.

Time to Re-Wire

Moral theorists will undoubtedly continue to debate the content and process of moral education, but a cursory review of local newspapers, talkshows, and popular musical lyrics suggests that there is an immediate need for intervention. We believe now is the time to re-wire moral education—not through separate courses or specialized programs, but rather through a creative, integrated circuitry of educational technology soldered to four universal moral sentiments. Since classroom teachers are always on the front lines, teacher educators must provide their pre- and in-service teachers with a range of proactive strategies to use when working with learners.

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Figure 1. Decisions, Decisions: The Environment courtesy of Tom Snyder Productions

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